

BENJAMIN GREENE HOUSE  
(Delta Sigma Fraternity House)  
259 Maina Street  
Brunswick  
Cumbarland County  
Maina

HABS No. ME-226

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
Nationale Perk Service  
U.S. Dapartment of the Interior  
1849 C St. NW  
Washington, DC 20240

# HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

## BENJAMIN GREENE HOUSE

(Delta Sigma Fraternity House)

HABS No. ME-226

Location: 259 Maine Street, Brunswick, Cumberland County, Maine

USGS Brunswick, Maine Quadrangle

Significance: Located in Brunswick's Federal Street Historic District, the Benjamin Greene House is a distinctive example of the Italianate style in the Bath-Brunswick area. Its history is important because of its original site in downtown Brunswick, its moving to a new location, and its contribution to the history of Bowdoin College's fraternities during the twentieth century. Many of the original features survive, including the elaborate wood trim, windows, and doors. The house was built by the industrialist Benjamin Greene, a prominent figure in the development of Brunswick. The architect is unknown.

Description: The Benjamin Greene House is an Italianate, two-and-a-half story frame building, with rusticated wood exterior siding. It was relocated to what appears to be a newer granite foundation. Formerly topped with a square, balustraded, hipped-roof cupola, and a hipped roof with balustraded edge, the roof is now devoid of these details. Under the later asphalt shingles, there is a sheet metal soldered roofing. The exterior is trimmed with elaborate oval molding at the cornice, soffits, and corner boards, which is echoed by the unusual curved window heads. Black walnut finishes the interior. Paneling of the large reception room appears to be walnut plywood. Walls and ceilings are plaster. The cast plaster cornice exists in many of the rooms on the first floor level. In the second floor front room, the elaborately ornamented plaster ceiling is largely intact. The original one-over-one windows have decorative hardware, sash cord and weights, and cylinder glass. The original wood panel double doors have decorated hinges. The flooring is "Frostbrand" oak, manufactured by Perfection Oak Flooring Co., Inc., of Shreveport, Louisiana.

History: In 1857, Benjamin Greene helped organize the Cabot Manufacturing Company, a cotton cloth mill having 9,000 spindles, one hundred seventy-five employees, and a capital of \$400,000. This mill also had its own gas works, and in 1859 Benjamin Greene became president of the Brunswick Gas-Light Company, supplying gas to the town. In 1874, Benjamin Greene was prosperous enough to build a \$30,000 house considered the finest in Brunswick. The house occupied a prominent corner on Maine and O'Brien (now Cumberland) Streets. After Benjamin Greene's death in 1904, the land, in what was becoming Brunswick's business district, was sold separately. The house was sold to the Delta Upsilon Chapter House Corporation for \$2,500. In spring 1905, it was moved to the 259 Maine Street location adjacent to the Bowdoin College campus. The path of the move crossed the Maine Central Railroad Company tracks. Railroad officials, fearing the house would get stuck on the tracks and delay the mail trains, blocked the house's path with locomotives. The confrontation lasted all day before the house was allowed to pass. For most of the twentieth century, the Greene House served as the residence for the Delta Sigma Chapter of the Delta Upsilon Fraternity. In 1950, the Delta Sigma Chapter pledged a black student, which was unacceptable to members of the national Delta Upsilon organization. Negotiations on the desegregation issue failed, causing Delta Sigma to break with the national fraternity. Eventually, due to rising costs, the fraternity donated the house to Bowdoin College. In the 1990's, Bowdoin abolished its fraternities in order to establish a change in campus social life. The house, needing extensive repairs because of deferred maintenance and design code deficiencies, fell into disuse as a residence. During fall 1999, Bowdoin College had the Benjamin Greene House dismantled by an architectural salvage company.

Sources:

Anderson, Patricia McGraw, The Architecture of Bowdoin College, pp. 160-161. Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Maine, 1988.

Bowdoin College Buildings, Box M8, 2012.1, Special Collections and Archives, Bowdoin College Library, is a postcard showing the Delta Upsilon House before 1933.

Brunswick map 1988.59.1, a Sanborn map dated December, 1889; an 1871 map showing the Benjamin Greene House on O'Brien Street; a 1910 map showing the location of the Delta Upsilon House on upper Maine Street; an 1877 drawing of Brunswick and Topsham, Maine, showing the Benjamin Greene House on O'Brien Street; are all in the Brunswick, Maine, maps collection of the Pejepscot Historical Society.

Brunswick Record, May 26, 1905, p. 1, and Dec. 23, 1904, p. 1.

Brunswick Telegraph, July 3, 1874, p. 2, and May 22, 1874, p. 2.

Coastal Journal, Nov. 12, 1969, p. 3, "Old Greene House Changes Location," collection of the Pejepscot Historical Society, Brunswick, Maine, Misc 12/20.

Delta Sigma-Records (4.7), Fraternities, Special Collections and Archives, Bowdoin College Library, includes a pamphlet, Delta Upsilon Bowdoin Chapter, June 1911, and The Polar Bear, May 18, 1938, p. 6.

Feasibility Study for Repair and Rehabilitation for the Delta Sigma Fraternity House, Brunswick, Maine, Walnrich + Burt Architects, Damariscotta, Maine; and Barba Architecture & Preservation, Portland, Maine; 26 September 1997.

Historic Preservation Survey of 259 Maine Street, #U12-9, collection of the Pejepscot Historical Society.

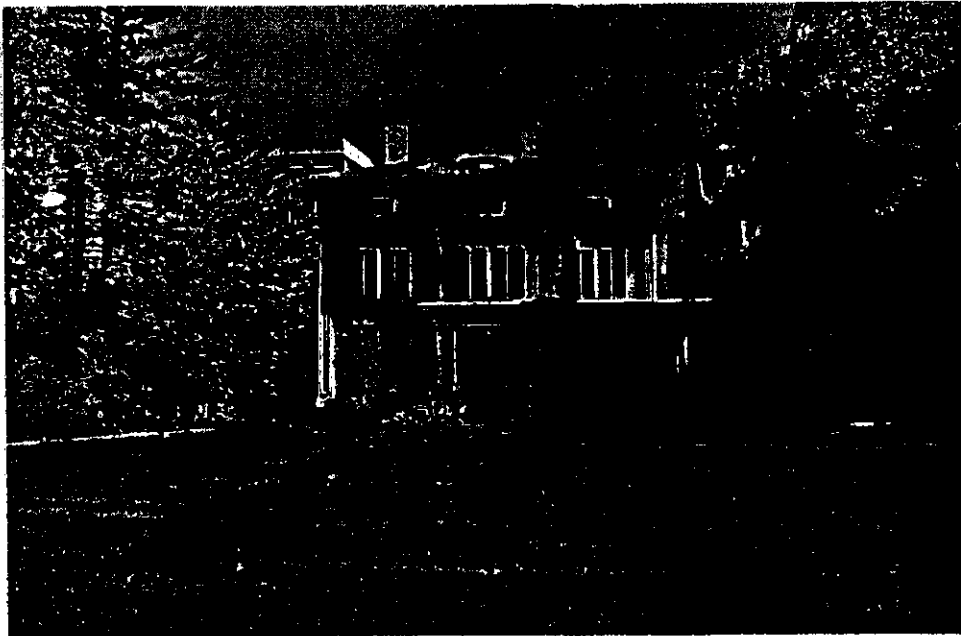
Pamphlet in the "Bowdoin College General" folder, collection of the Pejepscot Historical Society.

Photographs OH 1848, Benjamin Greene House Being Moved; and 1981.75.7, Delta Upsilon House; collection of the Pejepscot Historical Society.

Wheeler, George Augustus, M.D., and Henry Warren Wheeler, History of Brunswick, Topsham, and Harpswell, Maine, Including the Ancient Territory Known as Pejepscot, p. 567, pp. 570-71. Alfred Mudge and Sons, Printers, Boston, 1878.

Historian:

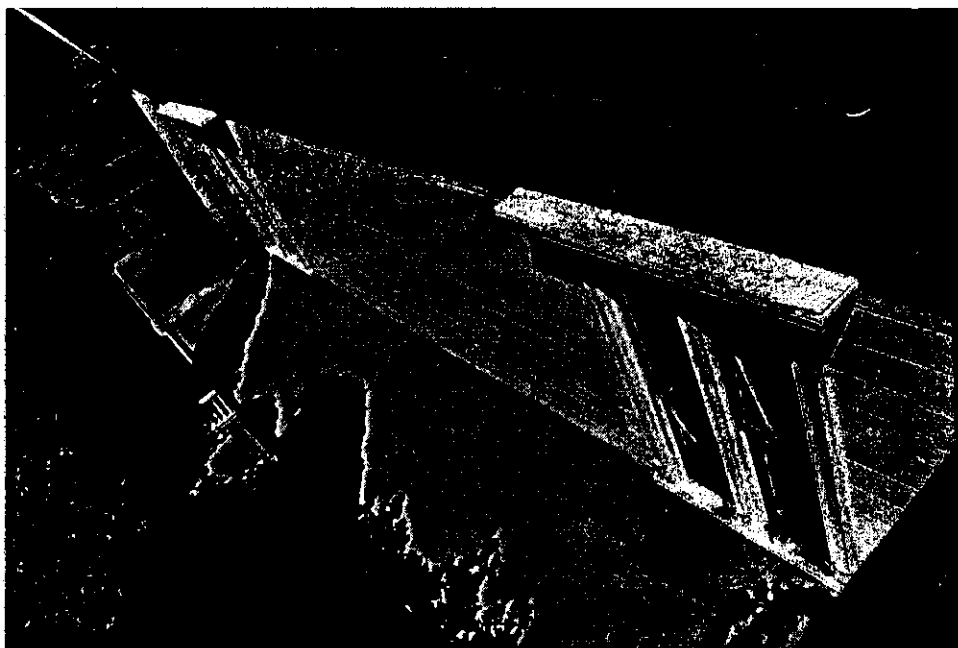
Barba Architecture & Preservation, March 2000



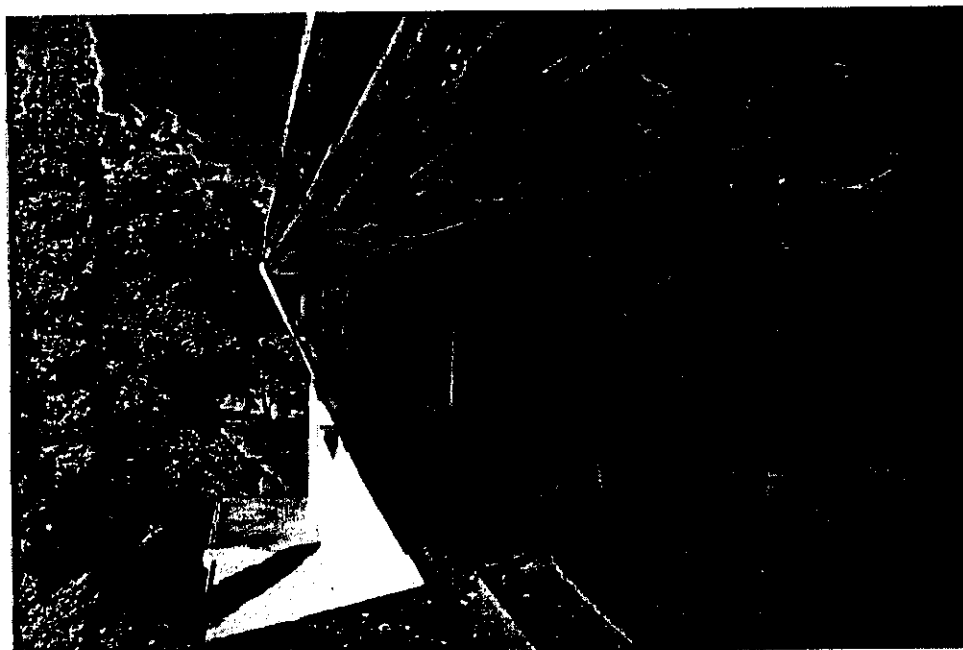
West elevation, showing another college building behind the house to the left.



South elevation.



South side, upper level, showing roof of great room



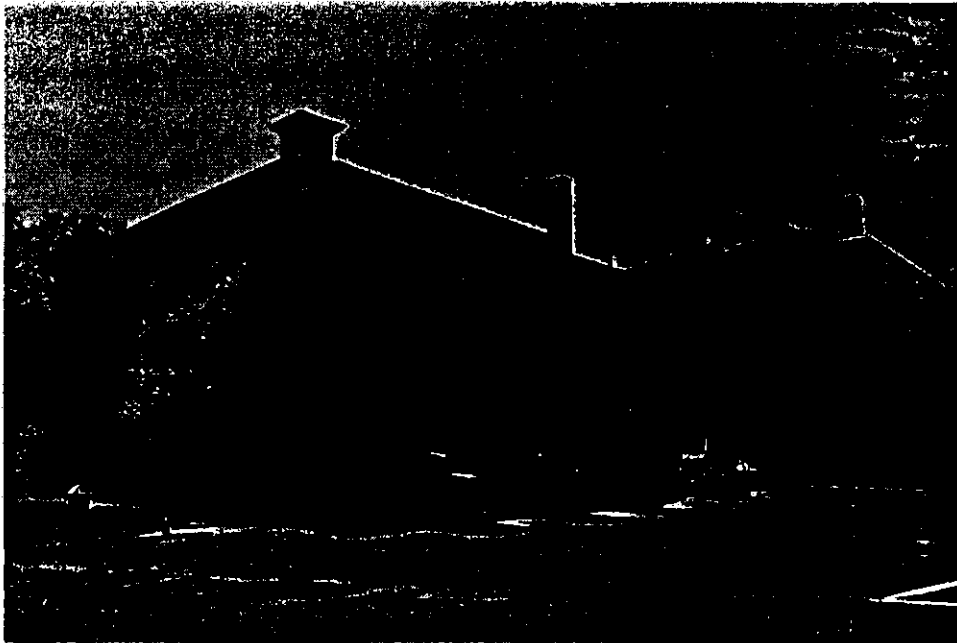
South side cornice



South side looking east toward the ell.



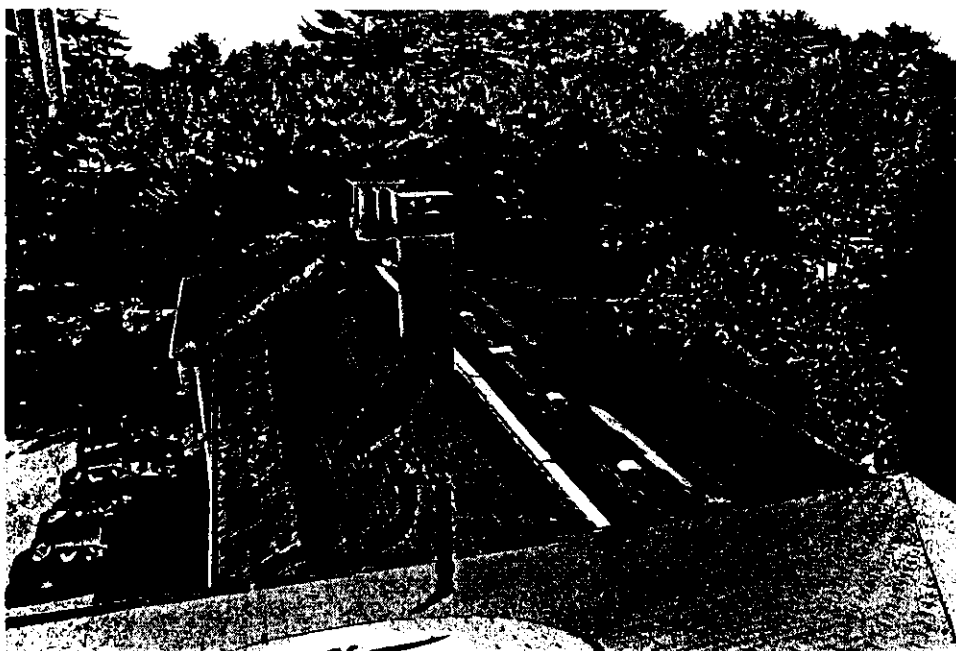
Southeast elevation showing ell.



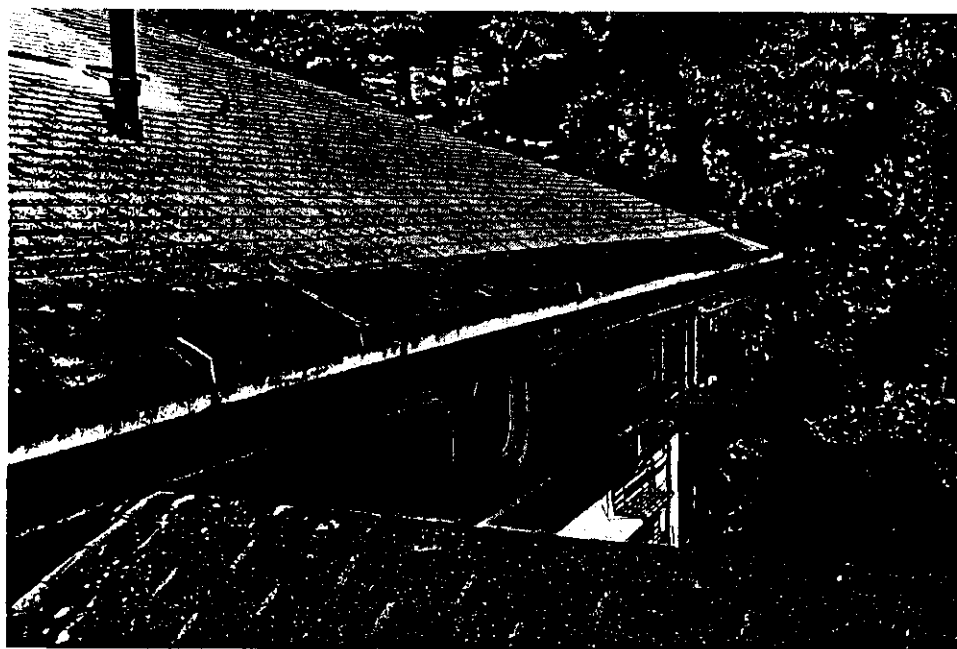
Northeast elevation with ell and barn.



Closer view of north side of ell.

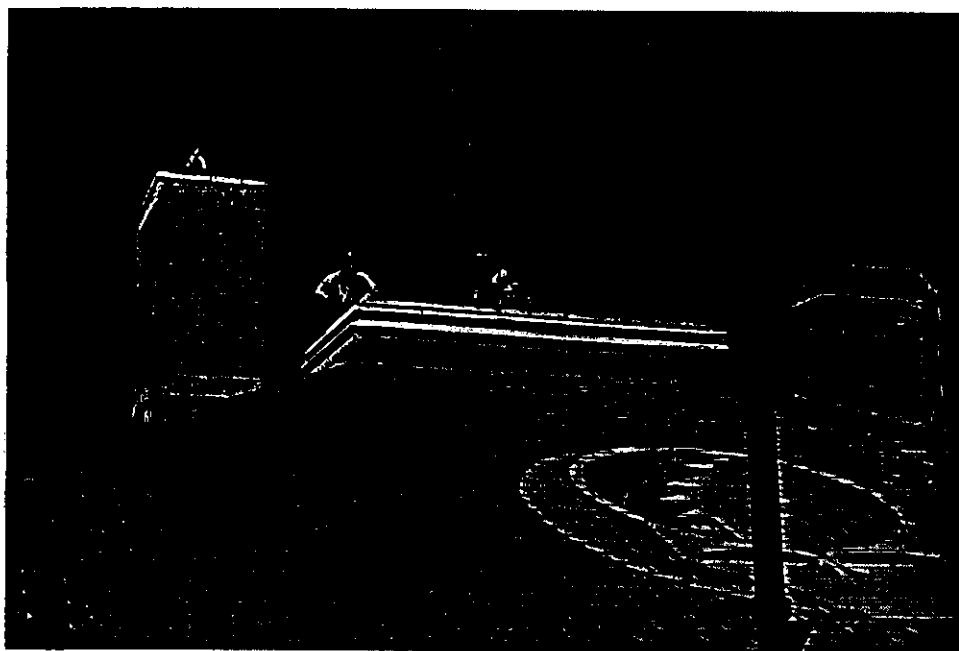


Roof of ell and barn

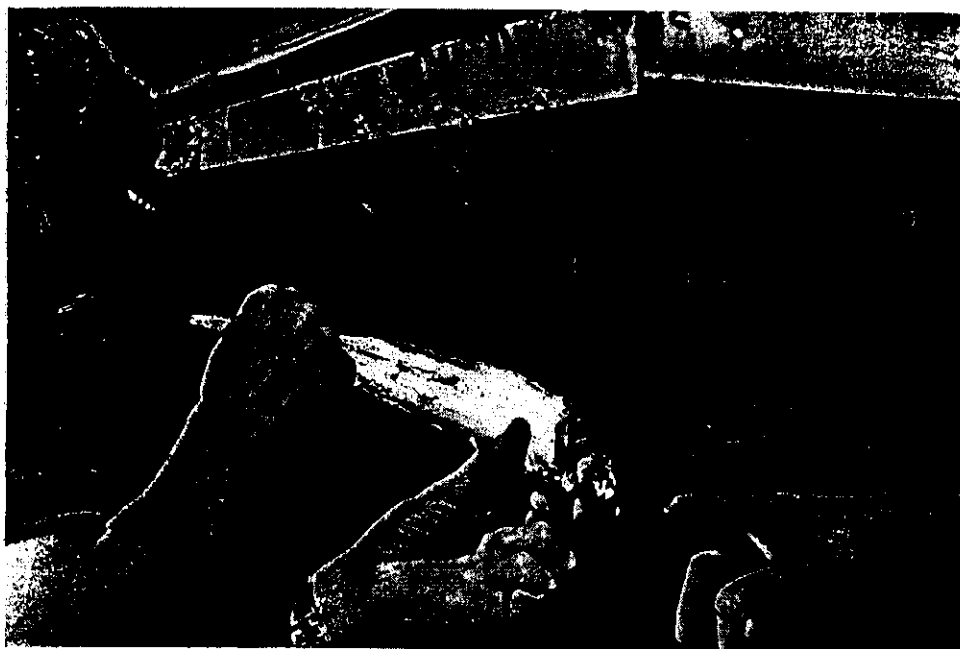


Roof of house and east cornice





Roof, showing location of former cupola



Cornice